
Handling a complaint

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Due to the nature of the services provided in the healthcare setting, complaints are to be expected. While inviting complaints may seem like asking to be a target, it is actually a perfect way to prevent small issues from becoming major events. Every complaint is serious, no matter how insignificant it appears. Complaints always contain emotions. Placing blame does nothing to resolve a complaint. Resolutions resolve complaints.

Many complaints are based on misunderstanding rather than actual events or results. Turn complaints into opportunities to explain purposes and quality goals of your programs, care, and systems. With every complainant be aware of the tone of voice, body language as well as the words used to express what can be done to resolve complaints.

The number and severity of complaints can measure the quality of care during any given period of time. Customer service depends on the effectiveness and ability to correctly handle and resolve complaints. Time and communication are essential in managing complaints correctly. The quicker the complaint is dealt with, the quicker, easier and more effective the solution becomes. Regular COMMUNICATION must be established and maintained throughout the process until resolution is reached.

Find the most important complaint first: When a complaint is filed, express understanding (do not admit guilt), and explore ALL concerns. Allow the complainant to reveal all the complaints until the root of the complaints can be discovered.

- Repeat or paraphrase the complaints to verify understanding
- Ask for assistance in prioritizing the complaints and agree which one to tackle first
- Use statements such as:
 - I understand your concern.
 - Your point is well taken.
 - That is a valid question.
 - Can you tell me more about that?
 - How do you feel this happened?
 - Apologize without admitting guilt:
 - I am sorry if that is what happened.
 - Please accept my apology for that situation.
- Listen without interrupting or defending.
- Avoid conclusions.
- Never judge.
- Don't place blame.
- Never take a defensive stance.
- Don't start solving the problem until after the conversation is concluded.

Refine the most important complaint first. The purpose of this approach is to make certain the complaint is clear, precise and confined to a specific event and not a general discontentment. Use phrases such as:

1. From what you said, it is my understanding that...
2. What you are saying is...
3. From your perspective you....

Defuse or offer solutions. Solutions can only be offered after an investigation has been completed. The source must be contacted when the investigation is complete, explain the results, and only then offer a solution.

Use statements such as:

- What would be helpful?
- Is that what you are looking for?
- Does that answer your question?
- Is this a workable solution?